

Happy Holidays!

Numismagram Newsletter #15 (XII/2018)



As we quickly approach the Christmas holiday, we are back for our final mini upload of new material for the year. Like our previous “minis,” this group is also thematic. That theme should become apparent as we go along, but first, a bit of holiday cheer.

Growing up, I remember erroneously thinking that the popular carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas” was meant to culminate on Christmas, thus beginning 14 December. Later on, when researching the lyrics, I realized that, in fact, it was meant to *begin* on Christmas, running through the entire “Twelvetide” Christmas season and culminating with Epiphany or Three Kings’ Day on 6 January. Speaking of the lyrics, the exact reading varies from one source to another, with the earliest known version having been published in 1780 in the children’s book *Mirth without Mischief*.

THE
TWELVE DAYS
OF
CHRISTMAS.
Sung at King Pepin's Ball.



THE first day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear-tree.

Since this 1780 publication, the gifts associated with the final four days have oft been reordered from version to version, while the rings of the fifth day were originally recorded as simply "gold" rather than "golden," necessitating the word gold to be held for two measures. Some of the wildest variations, however, relate to the avian presents--after all, birds account for half of the gifts given to "my true love."

The very familiar "partridge in a pear tree" has, at times, been recorded as a "merry partridge on a pear tree," a "very pretty peacock upon a pear tree," simply "the sprig of a juniper tree," and even a "goldie ring, and the part of a June apple tree." It just doesn't roll off from the tongue in quite the same way, does it? The four calling birds, as we have generally come to know them, were originally recorded as "colly" birds--colly being an 18th century regional descriptor in England meaning black. Later versions of the carol listed them as "canary," "colour'd," and "curley," but *calling* has stuck. Speaking of canary birds, this leads us to our theme for our mini: birds (and specifically, canaries).



The practice of breeding and keeping birds--known as aviculture--has been a long-standing hobby of bird enthusiasts, with the Avicultural Society of America being founded in 1927. In Europe, however, the organized practice dates back even further, with numerous local and regional clubs--especially in Germany--dedicated to the pursuit in the 19th century. Similar to kennel clubs, these groups would organize competitions in which a participant's flock could be judged against their peers, with the top finishers receiving prize medals for their bird(s). These medals were sometimes struck in different metals in order to distinguish placement, while other times the ranking may be indicated in the text. To add a further degree of personalization, some were engraved in order to convey the specific chapter which hosted the competition and/or the recipient of the prize. These medals also presented their designer with an excellent chance to showcase their avian artistry, as few aspects of numismatics display birds as the prime subject and in such detail. Take, for example, this attractive little guy, who kinda looks like a partridge in a pear tree...



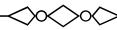
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Lastly, we want to wish you all a very happy and safe holiday season and a prosperous new year, from our nest to yours...



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